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Aerial Scapes and Technological Perspectives in the Science-Fiction of H.G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling

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Élodie Raimbault

1 Since the early modern period, panoramic aerial views of London have been abundantly produced alongside geographical and topographical maps, rendering the physical and architectural characteristics of the city in a unified and meaningful manner. Such images help define the city's identity, concentrating on its landmarks or on the limits of its territory. These views mix impersonal cartography with the imaginary and oblique perspective of a bird's eye view. In the chapter entitled "From matron to monster: London and the languages of description" in *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London*, Lawrence Manley shows how such representations intricately associated history, topography and ideology:

> If the city's names and handsome shape were graces it inherited from its ancestral founders, its resources were the rightful fortune at its disposal. Nearly all the London panoramas of the period make this point by foregrounding the Thames and its shipping, thus emphasizing a fundamental reciprocity between the powers of nature and culture. River and city, fluid and fabric, brought together a natural timelessness with human history. (Manley 145)

2 During the 18th century, the vogue of ballooning and parachuting experiments produced a new spectacle for the pedestrian on-lookers, with the balloon or the parachute as the focus of the collective gaze.[1] These innovations were seen as scientific advances because they allowed for an aerial viewpoint, increasing the geographical and topographical precision of cadastral plans, for instance. However, the possibility of an aerial view was restricted to the few adventurers, performers and scientists who went up, and the spectacle was experienced by most from below. They also tended to be seen as slightly improper forms of entertainment, often likened to childish shows. Paul Keen

explains that in the 1780s, many critics "emphasized ballooning's recurring and negative association with both foreigners and performing animals as the two antitheses of English propriety" (Keen 518). This is primarily due to the general sense that ballooning was an idle occupation, a form of transportation that could not be mastered and put to a practical use, which contrasts especially with the later types of dirigible aircraft, which could be steered, and are prefigured in the texts under study in this paper.

3 Aerial views were used by photographers as early as the mid-19th century. Balloons, among other means, offered an interesting vantage point. These photographs reversed the direction of the gaze: the spectacle was not the object in the sky any more, but the land or the city, seen from above. Notably, the French photographer Nadar took to ballooning and made his first aerial photographs of Paris in 1858.[2] Nadar made many technical improvements to the photographic apparatus and to the balloons and commissioned the building of a giant balloon which inspired Jules Verne's novel *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. Other aerial photographers later used not only balloons and airplanes but also unmanned means like trained pigeons and kites. It is interesting to note that the American photographer George Lawrence, who took a famous picture of San Francisco from a kite after the 1906 earthquake, was an innovator both in the field of photography and in aviation. This exemplifies the fact that in the Edwardian period, the development of transportation technologies, in particular air travel, was simultaneous with that of the visual technologies—photography and the cinema—, which prompted a surge of interest in the aerial perspective in other art forms, most interestingly in the field of literary scientific romances.[3]

4 William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890) presented a future with decentralised cities that pertained to the model of the garden-city, and E.M. Forster's 1909 science-fiction short story "The Machine Stops" located the entire population underground, making landscapes and cityscapes invisible. Conversely, in the science-fiction of H.G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling, gigantic cities and transportation are crucial, and the landscapes and cityscapes are seen from technological perspectives, in particular aerial viewpoints. These texts, written before the First World War, anticipate the first successful long-distance flights and postulate technological advances that had yet to become reality. H.G. Wells's dystopian novella, *A Story of the Days to Come* (1899), set in London in the 22nd century, as well as Kipling's short stories "With the Night Mail" (1905) and "As Easy As A.B.C." (1912), which chronicle a future global totalitarian society based on transportation networks and technologies, do not delve into the adventurous quality of aerial travels: instead, they produce a form of science-fiction that explores the social and political consequences of a change in perspective. This paper will focus on these three texts.[4]

5 As Herbert L. Sussman noted in his study of scientific romances,[5] both H.G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling expanded and redefined the conventional Victorian representation of the machine as a metaphor for industrialization. Wells and Kipling looked at how technological advances could go beyond furthering scientific and social progress in the future and have their own aesthetic and ethical purposes: "Like Morris and Ruskin, Wells saw artistic activity becoming increasingly necessary to sustain emotional vitality in the machine age, but differed radically in seeing technology itself as the source of this aesthetic satisfaction. With his biologist's sense of function, he saw that the machine could create a new form of beauty" (Sussman 168). Sussman also writes that

"[Kipling's] is the first major attempt in English literature to create a literary mode that would draw not only its subject matter but its very language from the fact of mechanization" (207). Wells himself acknowledged the fact that Kipling's language was informed by his interest in the technological, as he explains in *The New Machiavelli*, when he mentions that Kipling's "wonderful discovery of machinery and cotton waste and the under officer and the engineer, and 'shop' as a poetic dialect, became almost a national symbol. [...] he coloured the very idiom of our conversation" (Wells 1911, 100-101).

6 In the texts under study, the motif of the view from above is renewed through a technical consideration of the psychological and optical consequences of such points of view. These landscapes can be read as counterpoints to the pastoral tradition, while the cityscapes partly rewrite the Romantic and Victorian representations of a labyrinthine and dehumanizing metropolis. Flight and aerial perspective are not limited to "metaphors drawn from the world of insects and birds" (Hemmings 286), nor to the mythical and romantic figures of Icarus or Orion, even if Wells and Kipling do occasionally draw upon this stereotypical imagery. Flight is first and foremost the crystallization of a technical imagery that is both material and speculative, both pragmatic and programmatic. It questions the changing stance of the landscape viewer and the relation between the beholder and the space observed. The shift in perspective offered by the science-fiction stories of Wells and Kipling takes the spectator on board and presents the landscape, cityscape, seascape or even lunar views, as the most revolutionary spectacles created by the advent of flying machines.

7 I will look first at how such perspectives define a specifically urban type of identity by locating the narratives in a modern, systematized, technological territory. Another key consequence of the aerial view used in science-fiction is that it brings about a shift from the national to the global, through a process of dislocation and relocation: the aerial subject loses their local grounding and acquires the ability to envision the planet as a place rather than as a space. Finally, my discussion of the ideology of the aerial perspective will be based on Georges Didi-Huberman's 2013 text about views from above, « Penser penché ». Going beyond the aesthetic and political aspects of the aerial perspective, I will consider the ethics of this vantage point.

Technological perspectives and urban identity

8 From the airship in "With the Night Mail", the narrator first enjoys a brief view of "over-lighted London" through the "great colloid underbody-porthole" (WNM 115), but during the flight he fails to observe the English territory in detail because clouds block his view. However, because he flies at night he can see beacons of light flashing through the clouds in order to indicate the location of the main cities:

> [The Captain] points to the pillars of light where the cloud-breakers bore through the cloud-floor. We see nothing of England's outlines: only a white pavement pierced in all directions by these manholes of variously coloured fire—Holy Island's white and red—St. Bee's interrupted white, and so on as far as the eye can reach. Blessed be Sargent, Ahrens, and the Dubois brothers, who invented the cloud-breakers of the world whereby we travel in security! (WNM 117)

9 The country is reduced to a constellation of illuminated landmarks shooting up through the clouds. It mirrors the starry night sky and gives a systematized view of England as a network of cities and air routes, but we are cut off from the territorial,

earthly reality. In Kipling's later story "As Easy as A.B.C." again, even in clear weather the countryside remains almost invisible in the dark, difficult to interpret. The characters are flying above Northern Illinois in the following passage:

> None of the Lake villages gave any sign of life; and inland, westward, so far as we could see, blackness lay unbroken on the level earth. We swooped down and skimmed low across the dark, throwing calls county by county. Now and again we picked up the faint glimmer of a house-light, or heard the rasp and rend of a cultivator being played across the fields, but Northern Illinois as a whole was one inky, apparently uninhabited, waste of high, forced woods. (ABC 6)

10 In the age of the A.B.C., that is to say the Aerial Board of Control, the whole planet is governed by the Board, in an imperial structure founded on the notion of transportation. The sort of *Pax Britannica* that we see at work in these stories is the result of the population's lack of rebellious impulse and of their lazy attachment to the values of privacy and comfort. As a consequence, the countryside's role in defining a national identity is taken over by that of transportation: the motto is "Transportation is Civilisation" (WNM 135; ABC 20). The countryside, the "unlocalised 'Old England'" (Williams 10) where classical and neo-classical pastorals place the mythical agrarian society idealized by the urban elite, as explained by Raymond Williams,[6] loses here its symbolic and moral attributes; it is perceived as a waste land, a blank between the urban seats of technological and political power.

11 The motif of the disappearing countryside is similarly recorded by the main characters in Wells's *A Story of the Days to Come*. In the 22nd century, Elizabeth and Denton are nostalgic of what others see as the "quaint, adventurous, half-civilised days of the nineteenth century, when men were stout and women simple" (SDC 15); their common taste for old-fashioned technology such as books and writing is the basis of their love story. When Elizabeth's father refuses to support her and Denton financially because he disapproves of her unsuitable match, Elizabeth experiences for the first time life outside the idle upper class. After a while, they cannot afford to stay in the city anymore unless they work. The married couple decides to live "a simple life [...] like the people of old" (41), outside the city. The contrast between the city and the country is heightened in the second chapter. The city is sanitized, isolated from the rest of the territory and characterized by verticality and transparency: "that latter-day London, all glazed in with glass from the weather, and with incessant moving platforms that went to all parts of the city" (20). In the absence of any suburb surrounding it, the city is abruptly separated from its environment. The border is insular in its sharpness: "the towering buildings of the new age, the mechanical ways, the electric and water mains, all came to an end together, like a wall, like a cliff, near four hundred feet in height, abrupt and sheer" (38).

12 This peculiar topography is presented as the result of a continuous evolution from the Victorian development of the city, principally because London's modernity is still defined by its transportation system. There has been a technological shift from the train to the aircraft, but the city remains defined by its technology. The English population has now gathered in only four great cities, and all the inhabitants have left what is called "the vacant country" (29), except for a few outsiders. Agricultural work is performed by the Food Company workers who commute from the city. The countryside is reduced to an "empty garden-space" (51) from which the population obtains food and energy—with gigantic wind-wheels, flocks of sheep tended by a few outlaws turned shepherds, and vegetables cultivated by "huge agricultural machines" (39). Rural space

is industrialized and commodified, but most interestingly, it also appears to remain outside the scope of the city dweller's vision. Only Denton and Elizabeth, who are nostalgic of the Victorian way of life, could be interested in the countryside for its pastoral quality. They are the only ones who locate their desire for virtue and simplicity in the country, the only ones who look outside and leave the city's centripetal and vertical pull for a moment.

13 In scientific romances, it may not come as a surprise that the countryside fails to register in the minds of the machine-oriented narrator and characters; the landscape descriptions are partial, obliterated or missing. The agrarian utopia of Denton and Elizabeth is abandoned as soon as they face real danger: their lack of preparation for even the smallest amount of wilderness forces them back to the city.

Dislocation: the dissolution of national identity in a planetary view

14 With the advent of aviation, the impact of flight on the subject's perception of the world was viewed as a revolution and many artists reacted to it with wonder and a sense of awe, for instance in scientific romances. In optical terms, the aerial perspective enables an extension of the viewer's scope, a greater remoteness from the object, a dynamic and mobile point of view and a swinging, or tipping over. This perspective appeared similar to the divine gaze in its fluidity and totality. In a letter to Nadar, Victor Hugo enthusiastically hailed this revolution in perspective as a reversal between horizontality and verticality, as the means of adding a new dimension to human experience:

> La mappemonde devient bleue comme le ciel. Vous avez l'unité. Unité, c'est harmonie ; unité, c'est liberté.
> Qu'est-ce que l'aéroscaphe dirigé ? C'est la suppression immédiate, absolue, instantanée, universelle, partout à la fois, à jamais, de la frontière. [...]
> Transfiguration magnifique ! l'atmosphère annexée à l'homme. Prise de possession par l'homme de sa maison. Entrée en jouissance du globe. [...]
> Toute la quantité de ciel possible à la vie terrestre est ajoutée à la terre, et la ligne verticale est praticable. (Hugo 21-24)

15 The mirror-effect between earth and sky that we noted in Kipling's night-time description appears also in Hugo's letter, which highlights the sense of unity in space conveyed by this correspondence. Hugo presents a unifying and universal view of the globe, an all-encompassing view which does away with physical and administrative frontiers, and also with the categories of spatial dimensions. His sense of wonder is based on the experience of the aeronaut and on that of the aerial photographer, it is rooted in the belief that technology is the agent of progress and human empowerment.

16 In the texts under study, the thrill of spatial mastery remains interestingly cut off from any sense of local or national identity. The characters are often disoriented physically, with feelings of vertigo and instability, but also psychologically with a sense of their inability to belong. An ecstatic rendition of the aerial perspective can be found in the adventure tales and in the authentic accounts of adventurers, scientists and discoverers in the 19th century, for instance in Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon* when the balloon first goes up and gives the adventurers a glorious view of the island of Zanzibar, or in Gaston Tissandier's accounts of his balloon flights.[7] Such enthusiasm is

only rarely observed in Wells's fictional 22nd-century ordinary man who is accustomed to such views. In *A Story of the Days to Come*, the ordinariness of the moving platforms deflates the possibilities for adventure and sublimity in cityscape descriptions:

> Regent Street [...] was now a street of moving platforms and nearly eight hundred feet wide. The middle space was immovable and gave access by staircases descending into subterranean ways to the houses on either side. Right and left were an ascending series of continuous platforms each of which travelled about five miles an hour faster than the one internal to it, so that one could step from platform to platform until one reached the swiftest outer way and so go about the city. (SDC 57)

17 But in Kipling's stories, the narrator is not used to transatlantic flights and his perceptions often are coloured with a sense of wonder and awe behind his humorous tone, in particular when faced with wild weather in the storm: "We were dragged hither and yon by warm or frozen suctions, belched up on the tops of wulli-was, spun down by vortices and clubbed aside by laterals under a dizzying rush of stars in the company of a drunken moon" (WNM 131), which contrasts with the professional matter-of-factness of the experienced characters: "'Air's a perfectly elastic fluid,' roars George above the tumult" (131).

18 Even in these early texts, the genre of science-fiction goes beyond the initial thrill of mastery. Rather than presenting man's new optical and aesthetic mastery, it gives on the contrary a sense of dislocation: as a way to determine man's place in the world, the aerial view does not operate efficiently anymore. In the trip to the moon in Wells's novel *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) or in the scene of the storm in "With the Night Mail", the vertigo felt by the characters is heightened by the aerial perspective. In Kipling's story for instance, the tilting or "cant" is dramatized into a spinning, which hinders the characters from seeing any type of scape or locating themselves in space:

> At last we began to claw up on a cant, bow-rudder and port-propeller together; only the nicest balancing of tanks saved us from spinning like the rifle-bullet of the old days.
> "We've got to hitch to windward of that Mark Boat somehow," George cried.
> "There's no windward," I protested feebly, where I swung shackled to a stanchion.
> "How can there be?" (WNM 132)

19 Destabilized as they may be, Kipling's characters retain another form of spatial self-identification in their sense of the global. Identity is not site-specific when the globe can be seen in its entirety. We have seen that the aeronauts are often unable to see the landscape, but the exceptions to that rule arise when the view is global, given in all its planetary glory. In the following passage, the aircraft races the sun around the planet, offering the narrator a sublime planetary view:

> We seem the only thing at rest under all the heavens; floating at ease till the earth's revolution shall turn up our landing-towers.
> And minute by minute our silent clock gives us a sixteen-second mile.
> "Some fine night," says Tim, "we'll be even with that clock's Master."
> "He's coming now," says George, over his shoulder. "I'm chasing the night west."
> [...] Tim slides open the aft colloid and reveals the curve of the world—the ocean's deepest purple—edged with fuming and intolerable gold.
> Then the Sun rises and through the colloid strikes out our lamps. Tim scowls in his face. [...]
> Yes, that is our dream: to turn all earth into the Vale of Ajalon at our pleasure. So far, we can drag out the dawn to twice its normal length in these latitudes. But some day—even on the Equator—we shall hold the Sun level in his full stride. (WNM 137-138)

20 Such a global perception of the planet corresponds to the imperial structure of the A.B.C., and leads to the dissolution of national identity into a global identity. The universality of this vision is heightened by the association of Biblical and astronomical representations of the world. The Vale of Ajalon is a reference to the book of Joshua,[8] in which Joshua makes the sun and the moon stop in their movement for the duration of a battle, which hints at an imperialistic interpretation of the text. The astronomical considerations, conversely, open the narrative onto a more scientific conception of the place of humankind in the cosmos. As is often the case in Kipling's prose, the imperial and the universal combine in an apparently harmonious figuration of the world that can be read as political, or as poetically technical and scientific.

How optics define the ethics of the aerial perspective

21 The dissolution of national identity that we have just analysed does not mean that the texts escape the imperial framework in which they were written, far from it. Many passages present aerial views that convey the imperialist's commanding view of the territory below him.

22 However, as Georges Didi-Huberman explains in « Penser penché », the aerial perspective is not significant in itself; it needs to be interpreted in phenomenological terms. There is a great difference between the commanding view of a subject firmly established in a dominant position and the comprehensive view of a mobile subject who is leaning towards and getting closer to the land or city it overlooks. This alternative between two modes of aerial perception is not only aesthetic, but also ethical and political. The comprehensive viewpoint is more dynamic, because its verticality does not only run from top to bottom, it is also reversed. The beholder does not simply objectify the landscape, they also lower their gaze in expectation of an ascending movement, anticipating an influence coming from below in the form of a memory, a sensation or meaning.

23 In "With the Night Mail", the narrator and the other passengers of the mail aircraft enjoy a sense of superiority gained by a commanding view:

> To enjoy life, and tobacco, begin both on a sunny morning half a mile or so above the dappled Atlantic cloud-belts and after a volt-flurry which has cleared and tempered your nerves. While we discussed the thickening traffic with the superiority that comes of having a high level reserved to ourselves, we heard (and I for the first time) the morning hymn on a Hospital boat. [...]
> We slid off our caps and joined in. When our shadow fell across her great open platforms they looked up and stretched out their hands neighbourly while they sang. We could see the doctors and the nurses and the white-button-like faces of the cot-patients. (WNM 138-139)

24 The sound of singing and the gaze of the singers reach up to them and make them lean over and consider their position. The hymn they hear is sung by the doctors, nurses and patients of an aerial hospital which treats consumption. The scene is humorous, with the cigar-smokers above being arrested in their complacent contemplation and reminded of their mortality, in a text strewn with the polysemic word *lung*.[9]

25 In "As Easy As A.B.C.", the violence of imperial power is more conspicuous, with scenes not only of symbolically dominant aerial views but also of physical and military overpowering from above. An attack, which is seen by the authorities as an ordinary

act of law enforcement, is launched from the narrator's ship, using weapons which are not lethal, but also far from harmless: the ship is joined by the whole fleet, and the 250 ships subject the population to blinding light and deafening noise.

> The beams of light leaped down again, and danced, solemnly and awfully, a stilt-dance, sweeping thirty or forty miles left and right at each stiff-legged kick, while the darkness delivered itself—there is no scale to measure against that utterance—of the tune to which they kept time. Certain notes—one learnt to expect them with terror—cut through one's marrow, but, after three minutes, thought and emotion passed in indescribable agony.
>
> We saw, we heard, but I think we were in some sort swooning. The two hundred and fifty beams shifted, re-formed, straddled and split, [...] twizzled insanely round the horizon, and vanished, to bring back for the hundredth time darkness more shattering than their instantly renewed light over all Illinois. Then the tune and lights ceased together, and we heard one single devastating wail that shook all the horizon as a rubbed wet finger shakes the rim of a bowl. (ABC 15)

26 The attack is highly reminiscent of *The War of the Worlds* (1898), even if in Wells's novel the Martian weapon kills people silently and in an intense flash of light, one after the other, while in Kipling's story the light and the sound are applied to the community in order to discipline them collectively. This passage also resonates with the third book of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; the way in which the floating island of Laputa subdues the ground-level populations by lowering itself over them and threatening to crush them also hinges upon the aerial position of the imperial power. In both cases, the spatial organisation of the scene is the figuration of the power structure at work in the empire.

27 In Kipling's story, a condemnation of totalitarian power is ambiguously expressed through a layered structure of revolt and repression: the crowd of people who is crushed by light and sound is actually a conservative group who demonstrates against a group of activists advocating democracy. These activists have been trying to launch a public debate for popular government, but they are derided and even fiercely opposed by the majority. The general population objects to democratic debate and to the very idea of crowds. They accuse the activists of "[invading] their mental and spiritual Privacy" (ABC 22) by forcing them to renounce their isolated, private lifestyle and take part into a form of public life. The Board of Control's fleet intervenes to stop the conservative crowd from lynching the crowd of activists. In this dystopia, everyone's basic needs are met and peace is maintained thanks to the general contented apathy and the individualistic frame of mind of humankind. Kipling's criticism of the future apolitical indolence of humankind remains mild, especially since the activists of democracy are presented as inefficient. What is at stake here is the issue of a paradoxically benign totalitarian regime: no war tarnishes the A.B.C.'s rule anymore, the general population is compliant and happy to dispense with their civic duties. Yet, after the attack, the narrator feels empathy towards the demonstrators. The text gives an instance of how a commanding view shifts into a comprehensive view: initially, the narrator and his companions intervene to subjugate the demonstrators, whom they look down on, and the attack is launched from their ship; but after witnessing the trauma inflicted upon them, the narrator sympathizes with the victims. His own state of shock after the attack echoes the rising collective wail that reaches up to the beholders on the ship. The phrase "one single devastating wail" suggests how in this individualistic and private world, collective action could only be achieved after an experience of shared trauma.

28 In the story by Wells, back in London after their failed agrarian expedition, Elizabeth and Denton experience dire poverty and moral misery while indentured in the underground part of the city. By an unexpected turn of events, they find their way back into the upper classes at the end, when they leave the underground world and choose for themselves an apartment in an elevated position. The view from the lofty balcony prompts Denton's questioning of his sense of belonging first spatially, then historically:

> They were rooms upon the very verge of the city; they had a roof space and a balcony upon the city wall, wide open to the sun and wind, the country and the sky.
> And in that balcony comes the last scene in this story. It was a summer sunsetting, and the hills of Surrey were very blue and clear. Denton leant upon the balcony regarding them, and Elizabeth sat by his side. Very wide and spacious was the view, for their balcony hung five hundred feet above the ancient level of the ground. [...]
> Along the great south road the Labour Company's field workers in huge wheeled mechanical vehicles, were hurrying back to their meals, their last spell finished. And through the air a dozen little private aëroplanes sailed down towards the city. Familiar scene as it was to the eyes of Denton and Elizabeth, it would have filled the minds of their ancestors with incredulous amazement. [...]
> For a time Denton pursued the thoughts of this spacious vision, trying in obedience to his instinct to find his place and proportion in the scheme. [...]
> "After all—there is a long time yet. There have scarcely been men for twenty thousand years—and there has been life for twenty millions. And what are generations? What are generations? It is enormous, and we are so little. (SDC 110-112)

29 Denton's vision of the past is superimposed upon the present landscape and it leads him towards a comprehensive view, trying to make sense of their entirely unanticipated salvation. The situation could have prompted a commanding view, with the characters finally at the top of the social hierarchy and their home 500 feet above the ground—Denton and Elizabeth could have looked at the landscape below them in a posture of mastery, overhanging, with "a sort of satisfaction in turn aesthetically flitting and morally all-powerful, the impression of *dominating the area* like a gull flies over the waves or, as the case may be, like a general dominates his Ordnance Survey map".[10] Yet, despite the pleasure felt by Denton, his thoughts do not dwell on the sublimity of nature for long. His meditation on the landscape is existential and reveals his anxiety, his fear of being unable to locate himself in the spacious view below him, or in human history. Because he experiences the vertigo of height and of historical depth, he leans over rather than overhangs, he is one of those who, according to Georges Didi-Huberman, "are willing to *lean over* to better see and think. As they lean over, they leave their platforms. Their concept is more humble and riskier. Their view from above becomes a move for approach and tactility".[11] Denton is influenced not only by the visual aspect of the landscape, but also by all its sensory and emotional dimensions. He is moved by the landscape, in the sense that the view is not just the object of his thoughts, the view also induces his meditation.

30 However, Denton's "leaning thought" is checked by Elizabeth's sensation of cold after sunset—she shivers and he goes to fetch her shawl, which breaks his train of thought. This ending suggests the precariousness of the leaning posture, the probable future limitation of Denton's stance to a more detached and remote view. His momentary experience of the comprehensive view is however strikingly powerful, both in its ability to convey a sense of History and in its ethical dimension: this is the posture in which the Other can be truly envisioned.

Conclusion

31 Like other types of romance, science-fiction offers sensory detail as a basis for creating an imaginary world, as Gillian Beer explains: "Throughout its history romance has relied upon direct sense impressions to bring close its imagined worlds. Science fiction plays upon this by distorting our sense expectations and making us think through again the material means by which we reach judgements" (Beer 78). In the case of aerial scapes, the visual dimension of this technique exceeds the reality effect initially expected. Because it questions both the space depicted and the relationship between the beholder and that space, the view from above goes beyond its descriptive aim. The beholder and the reader are faced with a dynamic, complex view that needs delineating, interpreting, mastering.

32 Although aerial views often indicate the viewer's imperialistic position of power, Wells and Kipling manage to qualify this expectation thanks to complex characters who evolve and are influenced by the spectacle they gaze upon. Even if the instances of truly sympathetic, ethical, comprehensive views are imperfectly concluded in the texts under study, it appears that the aerial perspective is not limited to its cartographic and imperial practices and values. The ideological ambiguities of the texts are numerous, with their strikingly imperfect totalitarian regimes, their lazy rebels, their dislocated sense of national identity and the relocating perceptions of the planet and of humankind as global spaces. The sense of space conveyed by aerial views thus places the reader in a similarly dynamic and uncomfortable position, relishing the sensory pleasure of the views from above and pondering on the topicality and social criticism contained in these science-fiction narratives.

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NOTES

1. In the 1780s, after the Montgolfier brothers and Sébastien Lenormand inaugurated the trend in France, Jean-Pierre Blanchard became a famous balloonist and parachutist. His flights and jumps in France, Britain and the U.S.A. gathered huge crowds and were extensively commented upon, fueling a strong interest among the general public, a "balloonomania".

2. Nadar's early cityscapes are analysed by Thierry Gervais in « Un basculement du regard. Les débuts de la photographie aérienne 1855-1914 ».

3. The scientific romance, as exemplified in the writings of Maurice Renard, Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells, brings science together with high adventure and the marvellous, leading to excursions away from realism despite a technical background. It was first defined by Maurice

Renard in 1909 (in French, *le merveilleux scientifique*) but the term was abandoned by most critics and publishers when "science fiction", coined in the late 1920s by Hugo Gernsback, became dominant in the 1930s. The latter phrase covered a much wider field of fiction, in which the pre-eminence of fantasy and the marvellous was dropped. For more information, see the article by Roger Bozzetto.

4. The abbreviations used to reference the texts are SDC, WNM and ABC.

5. Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine. The Literary Response to Technology*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1968. Chapters 6 and 7 respectively deal with Wells and Kipling.

6. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, more specifically chapter 2 "A problem of perspective", 9-12.

7. In his 1887 account, Gaston Tissandier draws attention to his emotions when discovering the aerial viewpoint: « Quelle joie pour le débutant qui se sent mollement bercé par les efforts de la brise ! quelle émotion, quand il aperçoit la terre qui s'enfuit, les villes qui diminuent, l'horizon qui s'élargit, surtout quand, pour la première fois, il peut contempler de si haut le double panorama de la terre et de l'océan ! » (Tissandier 5).

8. "12. Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. 13. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day." "The Book of Joshua", 10:12-13, *The Holy Bible, King James Version*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, nd. 249.

9. The ship "lung[s] up" (WNM 138) like a submarine, it opens its colloids to let fresh air in; the hospital boat is called a "public lunger" (139), in reference to the illness treated on it.

10. « [...] le surplomb me donne une sorte de satisfaction tour à tour esthétiquement flottante et moralement toute-puissante, l'impression de *dominer le champ* comme un goéland survole les flots ou, c'est selon, comme un général domine sa carte d'état-major » (Didi-Huberman 196, my translation).

11. « [...] ceux qui acceptent de *se pencher* pour mieux voir et penser. En se penchant ils quittent leur perchoir. Ils ont le concept plus *humble* et plus risqué. Leur vue de haut devient mouvement d'approche et de tactilité » (Didi-Huberman 198, my translation).

ABSTRACTS

Aerial views have been used for scientific and entertainment purposes since the early modern period, but in the Edwardian period the simultaneous development of air travel, photography and cinematography prompted a surge of interest in the aerial perspective in literature. H.G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling analysed the impact of the development of air travel on modern societies even before the first long-distance powered flights and before WWI. Both authors used the aerial perspective in their science-fiction stories, justifying this naturalistic, bird's eye viewpoint by a technological advance yet to become reality. This paper focuses on Wells's dystopia *A Story of the Days to Come* (1899), set in London in the 22nd century, and on Kipling's short stories "With the Night Mail" (1908) and "As Easy as A.B.C." (1912), set in 2000 and 2065 under a global totalitarian regime. This paper argues that aerial scapes express not only a fascination for new technologies but also tackle political and ethical issues. The movement of the beholder and his elevated position operate a relocation of the city and/or the country within a

national, imperial or planetary contexts. Wells's use of the observer's physical distance from his homeland to expose social inequalities is to be contrasted with Kipling's more ambiguous political discourse. Aerial views thus stage the fundamental tension between an imperialist domineering position and a comprehensive viewpoint that enables the viewer to empathize with the space he leans over.

Les vues aériennes ont été utilisées à des fins scientifiques et de divertissement depuis le début de la période moderne, mais à l'époque édouardienne, le développement simultané des voyages aériens, de la photographie et de la cinématographie a suscité un regain d'intérêt pour la perspective aérienne dans la littérature. H.G. Wells et Rudyard Kipling ont analysé l'impact du développement du transport aérien sur les sociétés modernes avant même les premiers longs vols motorisés et avant la Première Guerre mondiale. Les deux auteurs ont utilisé la perspective aérienne dans des récits de science-fiction, justifiant ce point de vue naturaliste par une avancée technologique fictive. Les principaux textes étudiés ici sont la dystopie de Wells, *A Story of the Days to Come* (1899), dont l'action se déroule à Londres au XXII^{e} siècle, et les nouvelles de Kipling « With the Night Mail » (1908) et « As Easy as A.B.C. » (1912), situées en 2000 et 2065 sous un régime totalitaire mondial. Cet article montre que les vues aériennes expriment une fascination pour les nouvelles technologies, mais aussi une volonté d'aborder des questions politiques et éthiques. Le mouvement du spectateur et sa position élevée replacent la ville et la campagne dans un contexte national, impérial ou planétaire. Wells utilise la distance physique entre l'observateur et le territoire pour dénoncer les inégalités sociales, ce qui contraste avec le discours politique plus ambigu de Kipling. Ces vues aériennes mettent ainsi en jeu la tension fondamentale entre les deux points de vue qu'elles permettent, celui qui domine, impérialiste, et celui qui embrasse, en empathie avec l'espace sur lequel il se penche.

INDEX

Mots-clés: éthique, paysage, perspective, science-fiction, vue aérienne
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